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By THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON, July 18 — Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld said today that sharp disagreements remained among some in the armed services over how large the American military must be to carry out new strategic guidelines he recently negotiated with the nation's most senior officers.

Some in the military have interpreted the new guidelines, called "terms of reference," to defend current force levels and even to argue for more weapons and people in uniform.

While Mr. Rumsfeld said that no final decision had been made, he expressed his displeasure today with the work of at least one group of military planners who are turning the broad guidelines into a detailed strategy that can be used to plan a budget.

"It came back with some cases that were larger, some cases that were smaller, some instances where it didn't seem to fit what we had had in mind when we crafted, we thought we crafted, the terms of reference," Mr. Rumsfeld said at a Pentagon news briefing.

As a result, Mr. Rumsfeld said, he told those officers "to go back, look at the terms." He said that any ambiguities in the guidelines would be clarified but warned that the problem might be "simply a misunderstanding on the part of the team that was working it through."

Mr. Rumsfeld said there was no need to reopen the often tough negotiations that resulted in what he said was "unanimous" agreement on the future of the armed services among the Pentagon's civilian leadership, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the war-fighting commanders.

Although Pentagon officials say that Mr. Rumsfeld may still be persuaded that the armed forces need to grow, some senior officers say that his goal is to reduce costs to pay for President Bush's agenda of military reform. That is why Mr. Rumsfeld was so surprised that the agreement he negotiated has resulted in language now being used to defend buying more ships, building more planes and paying for more troops, these officers said.

"The secretary said up front that he is trying to free up money to modernize," said one senior officer. "Missile defense is their No. 1 priority. He has said to us, 'We've got to find a way to de-emphasize conventional programs to pay for strategic defense.'"

More than a dozen Pentagon officials and military officers described the classified guidelines, saying that under the terms of reference, the United States was abandoning requirements that its military be prepared to win two major wars almost simultaneously.

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Instead, the new guidelines order the armed forces to prepare for four core missions: to "win decisively" in a single major conflict; defend American territory against new threats; maintain global deployments to deter aggression; and, at the same time, conduct a number of holding actions, peacekeeping missions and support operations around the globe.

The broad directives are contained in a classified 29-page document, "Guidance and Terms of Reference for the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review." The document is the manual for the Pentagon's top-to-bottom analysis of strategy and budgets required by Congress every four years.

"When you give us those missions, and say we have to be prepared to do them 'concurrently,' I don't know how you get to less people or less stuff," one official said today.

Another official said: "The working group sized the force as close as it could to what they all thought the terms of reference called for. They came back with such a large figure that Rumsfeld fell off his chair."

Senior Pentagon officials said Mr. Rumsfeld had pointedly told those officers writing proposals for the structure of the armed forces that the new guidelines were endorsed by the chiefs of each of the armed services, with the message being: "Listen to your boss."

In setting priorities for investment, the new guidelines list personnel issues, followed by such broad areas as intelligence; missile defense; information warfare; pre- conflict management; precision- guided weapons; rapidly deployable forces; unmanned weapons systems; countering weapons of mass destruction; and infrastructure and logistics.

Some civilian Pentagon officials have also complained that, in the review, the military has been slow to shape its forces to fit the new age of combat in which intelligence data on enemy forces moves at lightning speed and even small powers have advanced and accurate weapons.

The Quadrennial Defense Review is due to go to Congress by September. Mr. Rumsfeld acknowledged that the accelerated schedule is making the work of the separate task forces more difficult.

Civilian Pentagon officials and military officers agreed that a central friction in the review was over how much risk the armed forces could accept, if the nation had to go to war today, to pay for the future transformation as envisioned by Mr. Rumsfeld and President Bush.

"We're trying to look at operational risks and evaluate them," Mr. Rumsfeld said today. "We're trying to then look at the risks of not doing a proper job for our people," he said in reference to issues like pay and housing, "and balancing that against operational risks."

Mr. Rumsfeld said that the Pentagon bureaucracy could assess risks in preparation for battle and that it could figure out how to attract and train quality personnel. But he complained that it was unable to make the tough budgetary trade-offs between those

two.

"The normal tracks or procedures or processes in this building tend to balance `likes,' but not balance different types of risks against each other," he said, "and that is what we're going through, and that is hard work and it takes a lot of thought."

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